

National Grange

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

A New Century - A New Grange



Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, CY-B402
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No.: 02-307
Application by BellSouth Corporation for Authorization under Section 271 of the
Communications Act to Provide In-Region, Interlata Services in the States of Florida and
Tennessee

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On behalf of the 300,000 members of the National Grange, the nation's oldest general farm and rural public interest organization, I am pleased to submit the following comments in support of BellSouth's application to provide in-region, interlata services in the states of Florida and Tennessee. The National Grange firmly believes that increased competition in the long distance market is essential for the rollout of necessary and advanced telecommunications services that will benefit rural communities in the two states captioned above.

A majority of our members resides in rural America. For our members, basic telecommunications services are vital to their daily lives. In many rural communities in Florida and Tennessee, essential communications for rural residents are only available through the use of toll and long distance calls. This places an extra financial burden on rural Americans because many rural residents live in vast geographic distances from one another. Rural Americans often depend on long distance telephone service to maintain contact with family members, friends as well as gain access to necessary public and commercial services such as law enforcement, local government, hospitals, attorneys and doctors offices. However, most rural areas are served by a single service provider. BellSouth's entry, as a large and new competitor, would drive down the basic rates that rural consumers would have to pay for long distance service.

Approximately 25 percent of Americans live in rural areas. BellSouth's entry into the long distance market will help spur an investment in broadband deployment that would allow families in rural communities to receive the same technological opportunities as their urban counterparts. Provider choice and lower-cost access to the Internet over basic phone lines is very important to the future of rural America. Rural consumers in Florida and Tennessee often have to use long distance to access the Internet, thus incurring both Internet Service Provider (ISP) and long distance charges. Access to the Internet and other advanced technologies can expand life-long learning opportunities, increase the quality of health care, enhance public safety, promote more efficient and environmentally friendly farm technology and make a wider array of services more affordable to rural communities.

We believe the application by BellSouth to provide long distance service in the two states captioned above will serve the interest of rural Americans. The National Grange looks forward to the FCC's approval of this

application so consumers and rural populations in Florida and Tennessee can enjoy the benefits of a more robust and competitive telecommunications market.

Sincerely,

Leroy Watson

Leroy Watson
Legislative Director
National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry